DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 479 656 HE 036 137

AUTHOR	Allan, Elizabeth J.
TITLE	Bringing Voice to the Silences of Privilege: Strategies for Faculty Development and Curricular Change.
PUB DATE	2003-04-00
NOTE	13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, April 21-25, 2003).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*College Faculty; *Cultural Awareness; Diversity (Faculty); *Diversity (Institutional); Educational Environment; *Higher Education; *Multicultural Education; Professional Development; Student Diversity
IDENTIFIERS	*Privilege

ABSTRACT

This study explored some of the complexities of diversity and multicultural education initiatives in a predominantly white arena. The specific focus is on the concept of silence as it relates to a multi-year diversity-across-the-curriculum faculty development initiative in the Educational Leadership graduate programs at the University of Maine. The seven faculty members involved in this initiative were all white, and the undergraduate student body at the University is 95% white. The Diversity across the Curriculum initiative involved nearly 2 years of focused reading and dialogue about diversity and multiculturalism with the intent to develop course syllabi and classroom practices that were more fully inclusive. "Silence" in this context refers to the failure to acknowledge or articulate advantages of identity privilege. The study of this initiative shows that working to bring voices to the silences of white privilege in predominantly white educational environments presents particular challenges. It is hoped that facing these challenges will make faculty members less comfortable and more willing to confront issues related to diversity and equality. (Contains 11 references.) (SLD)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

Commentary Paper

Bringing Voice to the Silences of Privilege: Strategies for Faculty Development and Curricular Change

ED 479 656

Elizabeth J. Allan
Assistant Professor, Higher Educational Leadership
University of Maine

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
E. Allan
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
1

AERA 2003
Chicago, Illinois

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Symposium:

Difference Disadvantage, Privilege and Us: Grassroots Educational Leadership Faculty Development for More Inclusive K-12 Schools

with

Suzanne Estler
Elizabeth Allan
Dianne Hoff
Gordon Donaldson

HE036137

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

> *"My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture. I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on individual moral will"* (McIntosh, 1988)

Silence: An Effect of Privilege

In this paper I explore some of the complexities involved with diversity and multicultural education initiatives in a predominantly white arena. Specifically, I focus on the concept of silence as it relates to a multi-year diversity across the curriculum faculty development initiative in the Educational Leadership graduate programs at the University of Maine. The seven faculty members involved in this initiative were all white. The undergraduate student body of University in which we work is 95% white, and the state of Maine has the highest percentage of whites (97%) in the nation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The Diversity Across the Curriculum initiative involved nearly two years of focused reading and dialogue about diversity and multiculturalism with the intent to develop course syllabi and classroom practices that were more fully inclusive.

The term "silence," in this context, refers to the failure to acknowledge or articulate advantages of identity privilege. Thus, in order to examine silence from this vantage point, we need to begin from an understanding of identity privilege. As McIntosh (1989) describes in her classic essay "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," *privilege* operates as a package of "unearned assets" that is largely invisible to those who possess it. She and others have described the challenges associated with recognizing one's own privilege—a process McIntosh refers to as "doing the arithmetic of the upside." Detailing a number of common ways in which privilege can be ignored, Allan

Johnson (2001) describes how well meaning whites remain complicit in racism by acknowledging the problems of discrimination, but failing to acknowledge how their whiteness provides them with daily advantages that are inevitably linked to others' disadvantage. In other words, they are very aware of how racial discrimination is likely to shape the experiences of people of color, but not as keenly aware of how their racial privilege has shaped their experiences as a white person. The same can be said for men in relation to male privilege, heterosexuals in relation to sexual orientation privilege and so forth.

Privilege is not a choice but rather a condition emerging from the unearned advantages that accompany particular identity categories in a given sociopolitical context. For instance, in relation to race, Jensen (2002) explains it this way, "white privilege is not something I get to decide whether I want to keep. Every time I walk into a store at the same time as a black man and the security guard follows him and leaves me alone to shop, I am benefiting from white privilege" (pp. 105-106). Privileged identity categories are by-products of a larger social system, or what is described as "a matrix of domination" (Collins, 1991) and interlocking systems of oppression. In other words, individual privilege resulting from sex/gender, race, sexual orientation and social class operate in relation to one another serving to support and reinforce much larger systems of privilege and oppression (Johnson, 2000).

In this conceptualization, privilege and oppression are inextricably linked. McIntosh (1989) describes it this way;

> "As a white person, I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage."

Privilege (advantage) and oppression (disadvantage) can be thought of as flip sides of the same coin. For instance, my advantages as a white person emerge directly from the disadvantages faced by people of color. Likewise, the unearned assets of my male colleagues are predicated upon the system of oppression (sexism) that disadvantages me as a woman.

McIntosh (1989) also describes "layers of denial" that work to protect and prevent awareness of one's own identity privilege. This denial and invisibility of privilege provide an important platform for understanding and examining the silences that prevailed amidst the diversity across the curriculum initiative for the Educational Leadership faculty at the University of Maine. If privilege is largely unseen by those who have it, then understanding and articulating it is unlikely.

Silence then is an effect of privilege.

Exposing Silence—the Voice of Complicity

> *"Intellectual and personal faculty development, supported over time, is needed if today's schools are to enable students and teachers to develop a balance of self-esteem and respect for the cultural realities of others" (McIntosh & Style, 2001).*

In our faculty development initiative, we did read and discuss the concept of privilege and its utility as a pedagogical tool. As such, it does not seem accurate to describe the concept of privilege as invisible to individuals in our group. However, even when one's privilege is made visible, the clarity of focus can fluctuate. Thus, at one moment, one's unearned advantages may come into sharp relief, yet at other moments may become blurry or invisible again. Thus, when engaging in faculty development around this issue, silences (as an effect of the invisibility of privilege) were not static. There were moments when individual voices acknowledged the workings of privilege in

their own lives and in their classrooms. Yet there were other moments when, in retrospect, the silence was deafening. In this context, I see silence as a signal of the lack of focus —the onset of blurred vision regarding our privilege.

As described earlier, the group of faculty members engaged in this curriculum transformation project are all white, from Judeo-Christian roots—and currently middle-class. Throughout the process, much discussion involved reflecting on personal experiences that led us to care about these issues, however, comparatively little attention was paid to unpacking the "invisible knapsacks" we carry today as privileged whites (and men, and heterosexuals etc.) Privilege was not ignored as a concept—in fact, it was rigorously discussed—but primarily as a potential teaching tool in relation to students who "don't see why race is an issue in Maine." Reflection of our own privilege is relevant in order to experientially understand the creation of inclusive classrooms to which we are committed. Discussion of privilege related to our own process of "un-packing" was fairly limited in scope and depth. Thus, for example, we failed to consistently consider, as a group, how our own white privilege (and for some—male privilege and heterosexual privilege as well) might prevent us from clearly seeing problems in our pedagogy and curricula. The exception to this was in the very early stages of our project when we invited students of color and GLBT-identified students to join us for a focused discussion related to their classroom experiences and recommendations for improvement. Otherwise, despite acknowledgment of individual privilege in interviews, as a group, we did not systematically consider strategies for unpacking our own privilege as we engaged in the curriculum transformation process (Allan & Estler, 2002)

In addition to the silences about the ways in which white privilege currently shapes our personal lives and our roles as teachers in classrooms, there was, in retrospect, remarkable silence about how various forms of privilege and disadvantage might affect the dynamics within our group of faculty. Even as we did not systematically reckon with our sameness as whites, we also did not explicitly address our differences as men and women, straight and lesbian, tenured and untenured—and how these differences and accordant power differentials might affect interactions among group members in general and in this particular process under investigation. There may be a number of reasons this did not occur: insufficient personal trust with one another; a perceived lack of safety implicit in the various power differentials within the group; not viewing reflective self-examination as relevant to pedagogical and curricular issues; and individual needs to gain greater comfort and understanding of the concept of privilege before applying it. For many reasons, this is obviously complex and risky terrain, which likely accounts, at least in part, for the silence we experienced around these issues. We also know that silence can be a powerful force in maintaining status quo. Thus, when dealing with a social change project such as this, it seems particularly important that strategies to address silences like these are developed in order to maintain the integrity of the project (Allan & Estler, 2002).

As such, it is important for the following questions to be addressed: what are some of the factors that serve as impediments to maintaining a sharp focus on one's own privileged positioning? What are some of the factors that can help to sharpen and sustain one's focus/awareness of their identity privilege?

Troubling Silences

> *The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tool here. They keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making these taboo subjects* (McIntosh, 1989, p. 3).

Style (1996) offers the architectural metaphor of a dwelling with windows and mirrors to describe the need for curricula to both reveal and reflect identity differences and affirm students' sense of self in relation to the larger social context. She writes, "education needs to enable the student to look through window frames in order to see the realities of others and into mirrors to see her/his reality reflected." For men, whites, middle-class and heterosexual folks, the traditional curriculum has long provided many mirrors to validate their lives and experiences.

In the case of understanding difference, curricula often emphasize the metaphorical windows as the predominant approach. For example, most mainstream approaches to "multicultural" education have focused on understanding "other" cultures where "other" is defined as that which is not white (i.e. multicultural awareness weeks, Black History Month, Women's History Month). One benefit of such an approach is a sharper focus on discrimination and disadvantage. A limitation however, is that the emphasis on looking outside oneself to understand identity differences does not provide an opportunity for learning to see oneself as a part of that picture.

In addition to windows, Style also offers the metaphor of "mirrors" as necessary to developing inclusive curricula. This is particularly helpful in thinking about students who are members of historically disadvantaged groups who need to see their own lives and experiences reflected in and affirmed by the curriculum as they also look outward to understanding those different from themselves. The limitation of this metaphor, in

thinking about those who live with identity privilege, is that we have always seen images of ourselves reflected in the dominant curriculum. Further, such unmediated images continue to blind us to the distorted reality of our own privilege. Even with the best of intentions, if we fail to develop the lens through which to see this privilege, we will reinscribe the dominance of the center.

For those of us who are members of historically advantaged groups, looking through windows to gain perspectives on experiences of those different from ourselves, must be accompanied by mechanisms that will de-center our own privileged positions. We need to develop a lens that incorporates the ability to sharpen the focus at a distance (difference) while simultaneously honing the focus on what is near (ourselves) in relation to "others" at a distance (privilege/oppression). Such an endeavor requires the development of a lens through which to see privilege—and importantly, the development of strategies for sustaining the focus of that lens.

Gaining & Sustaining a Focus on Privilege

> *For me white privilege has turned out to be an elusive and fugitive subject. The pressure to avoid it is great, for in facing it I must give up the myth of meritocracy.* (McIntosh, 1989, p. 2)

What are forces that shape a lens through which to see one's privilege? There are many. Autobiographical factors, catalytic world or community events, cognitive development, exposure to alternative discourses and conceptual tools for understanding privilege and oppression are a few of many forces for understanding identity privilege. What forces can serve as impediments to examining one's privilege? Like facilitating forces, these are complex and unpredictable. However, based on our experiences with the faculty development initiative, we know the following were common impediments to

our process: lack of time and attention; perceived lack of formal rewards; lack of knowledge base—feelings of self-doubt about one's expertise; and perceived risks to job security, collegiality and teaching effectiveness.

What are some viable approaches to constructing the lens and sustaining the focus for faculty and students who are privileged? Here are some responses to this question based on my faculty development experiences thus far:

- Promote understanding about the concept of privilege through focused reading, discussion and writing (see appendix for list of sources).
- Place a spotlight on whiteness to expose its socially constructed dominance.
- Similarly, interrogate heterosexuality, masculinity, middle-class status, Christianity, and ablebodiness to expose the dominance of these categories.
- Avoid pitfalls of intellectualizing—make it personal! Incorporate self-reflection with a focus on privilege.
- Unravel discourses and epistemological positions that can reinforce denial of privilege (i.e. myth of meritocracy, rugged individualism, Cartesian dualism).
- Develop intrinsic and extrinsic reinforcement for maintaining a focus on privilege. For example, grants that require accountability, presenting about your efforts at conferences and in other arenas.
- Work to build trust and risk-taking within the faculty group and classroom. As Beverly Daniel Tatum reminds us,

> In order for there to be meaningful dialogue, fear, whether of anger or isolation must give way to risk and trust. A leap of faith must be made. It is not easy and requires being willing to push past one's fear" (2002, p. 119).

- Do not divorce understanding from accountability. Reinforce the need to take action in response to one's privileged positioning.
- Focus on privilege as an essential tool for dismantling oppression.
- Develop an ethic of loving accountability for helping self and others to take daily action to deconstruct privilege and reconstruct broader based systems of power.
- Establish a network of allies for support.
- Learn about the journeys others have taken to enact anti-racist whiteness and other allied positions.
- Focus on what members of privileged groups can gain by acknowledging and working to dismantle their unearned advantage.

Summing Up

> Unless we as educators re-open our own backgrounds to look anew at how we were schooled to deal with diversity and connection, we will be unable to create school climates and curriculum which more adequately equip today's students to do so (McIntosh & Style, 2001).

The work involved in "looking anew" is considerable. While at times the work can seem daunting, and the power of privilege and conferred dominance can easily seduce us into a state of complacency, we must remain vigilant in our efforts to "unpack our invisible knapsacks." However, it's not only the unpacking that matters, "it is what we do with the knowledge and understanding that matters" (Wise, 2002, p. 108).

Working to bring voice to the silences of white privilege in predominantly white educational environments presents particular challenges. The same can be said for exposing the silences of male dominance in a predominantly male arena, or the unearned assets of heterosexual privilege in an environment where few, if any, GLBT individuals

are visible and so on with other dominant identity categories. The denial of privilege in such arenas can be more easily dismissed or ignored. As such, the work of exposing the harmful effects of privilege in such arenas can feel isolating and exhausting. Those of us, who see ourselves in such a place, may find strength in reflecting on the example of allies involved in civil rights struggles throughout history. We might also remember, as Beverly Daniel Tatum (1999) points out, "…how desperate White students are for positive images of whiteness" (p. 56) and how young boys are yearning for more nurturing images of masculinity and so forth. Further, we can continue to remind each other of what is to be gained "when whites, heterosexuals, and men join the movement against privilege and oppression, they can begin to undo the cost of participating in an oppressive system as the dominant group (Johnson, 2001, p. 169). I am hopeful that our work at the University of Maine continues to challenge us individually and as a faculty group. I am hopeful that we will work to become less comfortable in our work—that we will support each other in bringing voice to the silences, expressing our outrage in the face of conferred dominance and oppression, and finding productive ways to channel positive anger into productive curricular and institutional change. Eventually, I hope we can add our story to those of other change agents who have served as examples of courage and sources of energy for unraveling systems of privilege and oppression.

References

Allan, E. & Estler, S. (2002, April). *Difference, Disadvantage, Privilege and Us: Examining Meanings of Diversity Among Educational Leadership Faculty*. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.

Collins, P. H. (1991). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge consciousness and the politics of empowerment*. New York: Routledge.

Jensen, R. (2002). White privilege shapes the U.S. In Rothenberg, P. (Ed.), *White privilege: Essential readings on the other side of racism* (pp. 103-106). New York: Worth Publishers.

Johnson, A. G. (2001). *Privilege, power and difference*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing.

McIntosh, P. (1989). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. *Peace and Freedom*. July/August.

McIntosh, P. & Style, M. (1997). The S.E.E.D. project on inclusive curriculum (Seeking educational equity and diversity). Retrieved from: www.wconline.org/see/curriculum.html. March 6, 2003.

Style, E. (1996). Curriculum as window and mirror. Retrieved from: www.wconline.org/see/curriculum.html. March 6, 2003.

Tatum, B. D. (2002). Breaking the silence. In Rothenberg, P. (Ed.), *White privilege: Essential readings on the other side of racism* (pp. 115-120). New York: Worth Publishers.

Tatum, B. D. (1999). Lighting candles in the dark: One Black woman's response to White antiracist narratives. In Clark, C. & J. O'Donnell (Eds.), *Becoming and unbecoming white: Owning and disowning a racial identity* (pp. 56-63). Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

U.S. Census Bureau (2000). United States, White persons, percent, 2000. Retrieved from: http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/rankings/PL1110000r.html. April 8, 2003.

Wise, T. (2002). Membership has its privileges: Thoughts on acknowledging and challenging whiteness. In Rothenberg, P. (Ed.), *White privilege: Essential readings on the other side of racism* (pp. 107-110). New York: Worth Publishers.

HE036137

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

ERIC Educational Resources Information Center

REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Bringing Voice to the Silences of Privilege: Strategies for Faculty Development and Curricular Change	
Author(s): Elizabeth Allan, Ph.D.	
Corporate Source: AERA Commentary paper April, 2003	Publication Date:

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

Level 1

☑

Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic) and paper copy.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2A

Level 2A

☐

Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2B

Level 2B

☐

Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only.

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Sign here, please

Signature: Elizabeth Allan ~~Elizabeth Allan~~	Printed Name/Position/Title: Assistant Professor
Organization: University of Maine	Telephone: 207-581-3166 FAX: 207-581-3020
	E-Mail Address: Date: June 25, 2003

(Over)

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:
Address:
Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
1129 SHRIVER LAB
COLLEGE PARK, MD 20742-5701
ATTN: ACQUISITIONS

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

ERIC Processing and Reference Facility
4483-A Forbes Boulevard
Lanham, Maryland 20706

Telephone: 301-552-4200
Toll Free: 800-799-3742
FAX: 301-552-4700
e-mail: ericfac@inet.ed.gov
WWW: http://ericfacility.org

EFF-088 (Rev. 2/2001)